

# *Sketch*

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## The Barn

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Through the soft, soft darkness;  
Slip out into the gray,  
Slip out into the light  
And see a friend and feel a pebble.  
The flooding light is blinding.

I never can step far enough.  
I never can come close enough.

*Larry Syndergaard, Ag. Sr.*



# The Barn

THEY'RE tearing down the old barn today, faded board by rusty nail, year by year by memory. The ghosts of the lumbering, slow-moving work-horses snort and stamp fringed sledge hammers in protest. The dusty afternoon sunshine creates angles where slick bay hides years ago diffused the beams into little prisms glittering like fireflies.

In winter mornings, the stable side of the barn was a hoarfrost land of silvered straw. And in each stall was a black or bay chimney breathing frozen smoke through crystal noses.

We would get up early on a Saturday during corn-picking time and run to the barn through a morning that was still a night with stars and a faint-hearted moon. The yellow kerosene-lantern light defied the darkness for a few feet outside the barn windows, then the snow and the night stopped it.

Everything was lovely inside the barn. A horse with a star on his forehead stood by the door and nickered when we came in. We could hear Daddy and Grandpa farther down the line of stalls grunting and swearing softly to the horses.

In the center of the barn was a tumbled pyramid of baled hay. To us, it was a Mt. Everest with snow on top. The irregularity of piled bales made all kinds of nooks and crannies for two little girls to hide. One of us would pretend to be a wolf trying to catch the other on the way from home to Grandmother's house and back.

Usually, though, before the game was over, both wolf and Red Riding Hood became aware that each was ravenously hungry. A quick dash to the kitchen followed, with morning light chasing faster and faster behind. It caught up about second-pancake time.

A couple of years later, the last horse, except for a riding pony, was led from the barn, and the stalls were empty. There really wasn't any reason for getting up early to see a tractor started. No magic nor hoarfrost land in the machine shed.

Behind the barn about 200 feet and forming an L-shape around it was a row of lilac bushes. In May, when the lilacs were whole-heartedly blooming, the mist of a spring rain turned lavender and soft pink around the faded red barn. You felt as though you could never breathe enough of their fragrance, and each breath came shorter and quicker so that no second would pass when you could not smell them. We never picked the blooms for fear of ruining their lavender beauty.

If you climbed up to the barn loft and looked through the west windows, you could see the dipping, swaying hills stretching from our lilacs to the horizon. I could have spent hours there watching the cloud shadows skim over the ripening silvery-gold of oats, tracing the variegated green of beans and corn, loving the memory of the clover smell.

Experimentally, I tried making the scene more beautiful by barely closing my eyelashes so that the filtered sun created a rainbow landscape. I could never look this way long, because the undiffused landscape was more enchanting.

And now it's coming down. The spring mist will be an ordinary gray one this year; I won't see the cloud shadows over the oats, and the trees will be only tall, distant elms.

*Glenda Legore Long, H. Ec., Jr.*